A Layman's Commentary on The Revelation of St. John the Divine

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This book is based on Bible study lessons that the author taught at Paran Baptist Church in Lake City, SC. All of T.O.D. Johnston's Bible study lessons will be published as free online PDF files. Please visit our website and click on 'List of Bible Study Lessons by Book' at the top of the page, to view the free PDF books:
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Dedicated for knowledge, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to follow Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

T.O.D. Johnston's Commentary on The Revelation of St. John the Divine

Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston
2005

Revelation – Lesson I

The Revelation of St. John the Divine , chapter 1.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:
2 who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.
3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Greetings to the Seven Churches
4 ¶ John to the seven churches which are in Asia:
¶ Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;
5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.
¶ Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
6 and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.
7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.
8 ¶ I am Alpha and Ome'ga, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

A Vision of the Son of Man
9 ¶ I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.
10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
11 saying, I am Alpha and Ome'ga, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Per'gamos, and unto Thy-ati'ra, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto La-odice'a.
12 ¶ And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;
13 and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.
14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;
15 and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.
16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Revelation – Lesson I continued

The Revelation of St. John the Divine , chapter 1 .

17 ¶ And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid
his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and
the last:
18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for
evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.
19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are,
and the things which shall be hereafter;
20 the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right
hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the
angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou
sawest are the seven churches.

Beginning of commentary.

Verse 1.
This is a revelation of what was not before known. What was hidden is made plain. It was given by the Father to the Son. Jesus gave it to His angel, who then showed it to John. John wrote it down and sent it to the Churches.
Note the original word is transliterated into our word Apocalypse: what is revealed that was hidden.
These things will shortly begin to come to pass.

Verse 2.
The faithful servant, John, was careful and wrote the words (doctrines and prophecies) that he received by the revelation from God. This includes 'the testimony of Jesus Christ', and the visions he was given.

Verse 3.
These words are to be of great benefit to those who read or hear and keep them in their minds. They are to strengthen and given security to them, as the prophecies are about to begin to come to pass. To be forewarned is to prepare to escape or better in endure impending evils.
This closes the introduction. Next the dedication to the seven churches.

Verse 4.
John identifies himself as the messenger of the word he has to deliver from God (similar to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, etc.).
The message is for the 7 Churches in Asia (Asia Minor). This is not to say that there were not many more Churches in that geographical area. They may have been those most directly under John's care. The number 7 may be chosen as the number of perfection, and completion. In this way, they represent all Churches, thus this revelation was to benefit all Churches of all times.
Opening with the traditional greeting of grace and peace. This comes from the eternal God: which was in the eternity before time (creation), which is time itself, and that which is to come, the eternity after time ceases.

Revelation – Lesson I continued

Also from the 7 angels ministering before the throne of God in heaven. (See chapter 4:5,6 - "...the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth."

Verse 5.
And 'from Jesus Christ': 'the faithful witness' Whose every word is truth, whose testimony is infallible. What He says shall come to pass. He is the first begotten of the dead unto eternal life. He is the chief of all earthly rulers; they are under His authority and control.
God's love provided His Son; His Son loved us unto providing His life, offered His blood to wash us clean of our sins.

Verse 6.
We are made a kingdom of priests with direct access to God, His Father. This is the highest dignity given to humankind.
To Jesus Christ be glory and dominion both now and forever. Amen.

Verse 7.
The future return of Christ, coming from the clouds of heaven, will reappear even where He ascended from. The Jews will see Him coming and recognize Him Who they crucified. All kindreds of the earth that also rejected Him, that went their own selfish way will be faced with the fate of being rejected by Him (their reaction will be wailing). Let that come as it must: what they sowed, they shall also reap. So be it!

Verse 8.
Christ speaks: identifying Himself with the beginning and ending letters of the Greek alphabet: Alpha and Omega. He states His eternity: before the beginning, including all of time, and into eternity (which is to come). The Almighty, the Eternal Truth, Way, and Life.

Verse 9.
John again identifies himself as their Christian brother, who as well as them, has suffered persecution. He is also a citizen of Christ's kingdom, and experiences the utmost trust in Jesus Christ, which brings patience. He has been exiled to this small island for his faith and witness of the Word of God and his eyewitness testimony to Christ's gift of Salvation.
This island is small, with a very small population, located in the Aegean Sea, a perfect place to isolate someone.

Verse 10.
The beginning of the revelation. It was on the Lord's day: the first day of the week, commemorating the Resurrection. There began the vision of the Spirit of Prophecy. The Spirit was received by John and he was under its influence. Suddenly a great voice was heard behind him, a blast like a trumpet. This was to get his complete focus and attention.

Revelation – Lesson I continued

Verse 11.

Saying, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, as symbols of His being the First and Last of all things.

The directions: John is to carefully record in writing what he is about to see. It will be written in his own language and manner and collected. A copy is to be sent to each of the seven Churches in Asia. They are listed:

1. Ephesus – province of Ionia in Asia Minor, on the Aegean sea.
2. Smyrna – Asia Minor, 50 miles north of Ephesus. It was the largest and wealthiest city of the area and also on the Aegean.
3. Pergamos – of Mysia, on the river Caicus. Reputedly developed the use of parchment.
4. Thyatira – of Natolia, in Asia Minor, on the river Hermus, on a plain, about 50 miles from Pergamos.
5. Sardis – of Natolia, 40 miles east of Smyrna, on the side of a mountain (Tmolus).
6. Philadelphia of Natolia, at the foot of Mt. Tmolus, southeast of Sardis.
7. Laodicea, of Phrygia, on the Lyrcus river.

Verse 12.

At this point, John turned around to see the person from whom the voice had come. First he saw seven golden lamps on individual lamp stands. Obviously each lamp represented one of the seven churches. They were of utmost value (being gold), bearing light continually as light from God, shining out to the world (in darkness).

Verse 13.

In the middle of these 7 lampstands, a person stood, identified as the Son of Man, even Christ. The clothing is that of a high priest, the sacred robe, down to the feet. About the chests was a golden belt, emblem of royalty and a high priest's sacred dignity.

Verse 14.

This description of the head of Christ starts with pure white (wool and snow), but implies a splendour of light also emanating from the whiteness as radiant glory and encircling it.

His eyes as a flame burning, with movement and a sense of penetrating (omniscience).

Verse 15.

His feet like fine brass – both strong and durable, more than any other metallic compounds or elements. The color was amber. The dazzling brightness was so great as to suggest they resembled such metal 'burning in a furnace'.

His voice was like the description of God's voice in Ezekiel 43:2 – 'the noise of many waters'. Both deep and vast at the same time.

Revelation – Lesson I continued

Verse 16.

Seven stars in His right hand (later identified as the seven angels, the messengers of the 7 Churches). Being in Christ's right hand shows His special concern, care, authority, and protection.

Out of His mouth a sharp two-edged sword – the Word of God and of judgment. (The sword and the spirit – Ephesians 6:17.) His face radiated such brightness as to be described as the sun in its greatest shining.

Verse 17.

John's immediate response was astonishment to the point of falling down as stunned senseless (as dead). Christ laid His right hand upon him, reassuring John that he had nothing to fear, and raised him up. Christ spoke a word of reassurance - “I am the first and the last”. John recognized Him as the same Lord he knew, and would know forever.

Verse 18.

Continuing, He was dead but now lives, the great 'I am', the eternal. So be it! He has the power and authority over hell and death. He can destroy the living and raise the dead.

Verse 19.

Again, directions as to John's task – to write down the things he has already witnessed, what he was about to see, about the 7 Churches, and also what he was to see afterwards. All must be recorded.

Verse 20.

Explanation of the 7 stars: they represent the angels of the 7 Churches. The 7 lampstands represent the 7 Churches. The angels, as messengers, as messengers, could be onsidered as the ministers of each Church. The lamps – the ministry of the Churches as light, warmth, life, in their communities as evidence of their possession of the Lord, His Grace, love and the Holy Spirit – the oil and the fire.

Next, the Letters to the Churches.

Revelation – Lesson II

Letters to the 7 churches begin (the first 4 in this chapter). General introduction: each letter is written to the pastor of that particular assembly: the one responsible for their edifying teaching and leader, as ordained by Christ and His apostles. What is written is the description of the whole assembly in general and addressed to the whole Church.

The Revelation of St. John the Divine , chapter 2.

The Message to Ephesus
1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.
2 ¶ I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:
3 and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.
4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.
5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.
6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicola'itans, which I also hate.
7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The Message to Smyrna
8 ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.
9 ¶ I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.
10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The Message to Pergamos
12 ¶ And to the angel of the church in Per'gamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.
13 ¶ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein An'tipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.
14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Ba'laam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicola'itans, which thing I hate.
16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.
17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

The Message to Thyatira
18 ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Thy-ati'ra write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.
19 ¶ I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.
20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jez'ebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.
21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.
22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.
23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.
24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thy-ati'ra, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.
25 But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.
26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:
27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.
28 And I will give him the morning star.
29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Beginning of commentary.

Verse 1.
To the Church at Ephesus, where John had chiefly resided. Christ identifies Himself as the One that holds the 7 starts in His right hand. He upholds, guides and preserves the ministers of each Church, representing all Churches of all times. He Who walks in the midst of the 7 golden lampstands, as the Head of all those churches, representing all churches throughout the world.

Verse 2.
It should be always understood that the Lord is aware of all that is taking place on the earth, both materially and spiritually.

Revelation – Lesson II continued

Christ knows the works of each Church. It is important to note that whatever is worthy of praise in any of the Churches is mentioned first. A positive call to persevere, diligently encourage, and strengthen the bonds of God's love to renewal and maturity.

Their works:
1. They are active (labor);
2. They have patience;
3. They would not tolerate evil men;
4. They tested those that claimed apostolic authority and found them to be false, deceitful liars.

Verse 3.
They have carried on with patience. For Christ's Name they have continued to hold together (without fainting) in the strength of their faith and the bonds of His love.

Verse 4.
Nevertheless, Christ has something against them – they have left their first heartfelt and strong affection for God that they had when they first believed.

Verse 5.
Remember the peace, love, forgiveness, and joy you experienced in salvation. You had thankful hearts, desired to please God, to share the Gospel, to reach out unselfishly to help and care for others, to pray and psend time with Gd in His word and worship.
Think about how much you have lost. Stop, turn around and go back to doing those things for those reasons. Live fully and honorably as God's child and renew your closeness with Him.
This Church cannot survive as it is. It is in danger of being judged and destroyed (their lampstand removed from its place, away from God's concern). Therefore repent.

Verse 6.
One thing they did right, they rejected (hated) the teachings of one Nicholas (the Nicolaitanes). Christ also hated them. They allowed adultery and promiscuity, mixed pagan rites with Christian ceremonies, ate meat offered to idols.

Verse 7.
A call to every person, every Christian – listen carefully, with intelligent attention, to what the Holy Spirit in saying to the Churches. To those who remain steadfast in the faith, who is not led away by error, Jesus will give the reward, to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. This is the food of the immortal, in the home of the Almighty.

Verse 8.
To the minister in chrage of the Church in Smyrna. From the first and last, who was dead and is alive, glorified and eternal.

Revelation – Lesson II continued

Verse 9.
Again, He knows their works. He is aware that they are being persecuted. They have suffered. They were also materially very poor (probably because of their faith). But they are accounted wealthy in that faith, and blessed by God spiritually.
There are those who profess being Jews, that they worshipped the true God. They are false and call unholy things holy, in effect serving their own lusts, as in a synagogue of satan.

Verse 10.
Suffering is coming, but do not give in to fear. The devil will cause some to be put into prison and to be tried. This tribulation will be but a short time (10 days). If you remained faithful and are put to death, then your death will bring you eternal life – you will be crowned as victor over death in the presence of God.

Verse 11.
Again the call to careful attention to these words from the Spirit to the Churches. THe overcover will not experience the second death – etenral, final separation from God in hell.

Verse 12.
To the minister of the CHurch in Pergamos. From the One that has the sharp sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (it cuts in every direction).

Verse 13.
Christ knows their works. This heathen place is classed where satan reigns, false gods and their sinful practices of every description. But this assembly of believers have held fast to their faith, even when severe persecution led to the martyrdom of one of their members, Antipas. He was killed (possibly by a mob) in that city. The hatred and evil was under satan's influence.

Verse 14.
First commendation, now a few flaws. There were some in the Church that were doing things of an impure, therefore sinful nature – they were stumbling blocks – temptations to lead away from purity. Two details – the eating of things sacrificed to idols, and fornication. These are classed as like Balaam who told Balac how to cause the Israelites to sin against God.

Verse 15.
There were some who were Nicolaitanes who taught heresies (see verse 2:6), which Christ hates.

Verse 16.
Repent! They must turn these evil people out of their assembly immediately. To allow them to stay will bring judgments against them (which will also harm the Church). The best outcome would be to call upon these heretics to repent and turn to the Truth of Christ, then judgments will no longer be necessary. The double edged Sword of the Spirit is mentioned as the weapon to fight against them with.

Revelation – Lesson II continued

Verse 17.

Carefully listen to this message from the Holy Spirit. To the overcomer will be given the hidden manna (originlly placed in the Ark of the Covenant), spiritual sustenance from God. The white stone meant pardon or acquittal (a black stone meant condemnation). This comes from the custom used by judges in ancient times to given their verdict by black or white 'pebbles'. The engraving of a new name (as a child of God) gave rights to the holder as full citizen in heaven.

Verse 18.

To the minister of the Church at Thyatira: from the Son of God, eyes like flaming fire, feet like fine brass.

Verse 19.

Christ knows their best qualities – first, their unselfish love for God and the brethren service in reaching out to the poor and less fortunate. Their faith was strong and true. They also showed patience in distressing situations, persectuion. This continued over time. They also grew in grace and in knowledge and understanding and love of Jesus Christ. The last works were more than the first.

Verses 20,21.

There is a major flaw that must be dealt with. A woman of power and influence who teaches and seduces Christ's servants to do evil. She is called Jezebel after Ahab's evil wife of the same name (2 Kings 9:10) who corrupted true religion and harassed the followers of God. This one claimed to be a prophetess, to deceive the elect to profane practices (fornication, heathen rites, eating sacrificial idol animals). It is possible this person was the wife of the minister, which would be why she was allowed to go this far.

As God had snt Elijah to pronounce judgment against Ahab. He showed some turning toward God, his punishment was put off. In this case, giving this woman a period of time to repent – she did not.

Verse 22.

In the case of Jezebel, her son who was as guilty as his mother was cast into a bed of affliction, where he died. His brother suffered the same fate. These were warnings to Jezebel. This woman is warned of a fate of being bedridden to suffer great torment as well as those that participated with her. Only repentance can prevent this.

Verse 23.

Her children also will be killed. This will be obvious judgment against them by He Who knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. As with Jezebel's two sons and the 70 sons of Ahab, all were slain by the hand of God (2 Kings 10:1). What was done in secret will come to light in this outcome.

Verses 24,25.

To the rest of the Church there, that have not had any part of this false doctrine (depths of satan): Christ places no other burden; they are to continue in the sound doctrine and appropriate speech and

actions that they already practice: persevere and hold fast.

Verse 26.
The promise of reward to the overcomers. This is to rule over nations when Christ returns to set up His kingdom. To have kept the commandments of Christ prepares to instruct and rule over others for the same result.

Verse 27.
The rule will be strict, just, and certain punishment to those who rebel. The punishment will be like the shattering of a clay pot into small pieces: both persons and their practices. The rule is from Christ, even as His rule was received from His father.

Verse 28.
Next to the sun, the morning start (Venus) is the next. Thus the kingdom will be second only to the kingdom of Christ (the Sun, the Son). It also would include honor and glory of the person.

Verse 29.
Every Christian should pray the most serious attention to these words of encouragement and of warning of judgment.

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